

# Editorial

Imphal, Friday, January 15, 2016

## The changing face of Manipur's bureaucrats

It can arguably be stated that the present Chief Minister of Manipur - Okram Ibobi should be credited with ushering in a stable government after the chaos and confusions of political infightings and party-hopping that was threatening to disintegrate the already volatile political scenario in the state. That he was selected from amongst a motley crew of political heavyweights contending for the top post by the centre speaks volumes of his underestimated ability to convince and control the situation. He was, in all fairness, a rank outsider when it comes to the race for the Chief Minister's chair, but to the incomprehensible amazement and no small sense of betrayal, he became the man at the helm of affairs, and love it or hate it, he has been at the most coveted political post for three terms consecutively.

While the vicious criticisms and accusations of his style of governance and questions about his earnestness to develop the state continue unabated, it must be said that at present, there is a semblance of political stability, if not anything else, and that this general perception has been able to pacify the public on various counts so far. There is also a subtle yet perceptible change in the atmosphere and attitude of the bureaucrats dispensing their entrusted duties to the state. Of late, the sense of urgency and earnestness being displayed by these bureaucrats have proved to be a welcome relief and a reason for raising one's hope of a better state, albeit still with dollops of cynicism and reservations.

One prominent example of the positive change being witnessed by the public is the atarcity and enthusiasm with which the Clean Imphal project which is being carried out as a precursor to the efforts and objective of developing Imphal into a Smart City. The increase in the drive and energy of the workers is unmistakable, and would only be possible when the authorities and bureaucrats at the top have encouraged and provided the much needed fillip to boost the morale of the workers. Another instance worth mentioning is the efforts being put in by the Manipur State Power Distribution Corporation Limited (MSPDCL) since its inception in 2014 not only to provide prepaid metered power supply to every family in the state, but also the relentless drive to spread awareness regarding judicious use of power and ways to conserve energy - steps which would benefit the consumers as well as the state as a whole, making Manipur self reliant in power and saving valuable resources while being able to enjoy uninterrupted power supply. The Regional News Unit of All India Radio, with the initiative of an individual from the state have tapped the tremendous reach of social media networks to popularize and made available the news of the region beyond the conventional reach. The changing face of bureaucrats can also be gauged by an incident when a newly selected bureaucrat defied threats from seniors and politicians, refusing to sign an acknowledgment for a shabby contract work, even to the point of being deputed elsewhere. The energized and enthusiastic bureaucrats, especially the young crop should be encouraged to dispense their duties without restraint or undue pressure. An assuring and encouraging attitude from the Chief Minister will go a long way towards that end. There are also entities like Imphal Times ready to stand up and provide support anytime - everytime.

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Contd. from previous issue

## Shumang Lila (Courtyard Play) in Tribal dialects: A case study

### AS A TRADITIONAL MASS MEDIA

In the early 20th century a distinct form of Swadeshi Jaatra or nationalist traditional theatre came into being in Bengal. Mahatma Gandhi's non-cooperation movement and removal of untouchability were favorite themes of these Jaatras. From a small beginning it became a powerful medium to communicate with the high and the low, the literate and the illiterate, the religious congregation and popular masses alike. During the Indian freedom struggle, mass opinion was generated by direct oppression in the folk art forms such as songs, dance and drama throughout India. Particularly in West Bengal and Maharashtra, where struggle for freedom was at its fiercest, the traditional media were utilized to instill patriotic feelings in the people's mind. Today, the state governments are using the very same art forms to convey ideas of family welfare, banking, education, health and prohibition. Besides entertaining people and making them forget their day-to-day tensions and worries, Shumang Lila as a traditional media carries a heavy responsibility to educate people on various issues both local and international. It has three important characteristic motives - entertaining, educative and reformative. After the infamous Hunger Marchers' Day of 27 August 1965, the Manipur Peoples' Party produced a Shumang Lila entitled "Chak Tangba" revealing the misdeeds of Congress Party in connection with the incident. It was said to be an effective campaign against the ruling party.

Various government and non-government agencies have been judiciously employing Shumang Lila to carry messages to the people. Playwright Rupachandra Gosh's "Singareina Kenkhrabadi" performed by Meitei Leima Jatra cum Drama Association (Cheitei Party) and "Kanagi Marano" (tr. Whose fault), based on Polio Immunization performed by Bir Tikendrajit Artistes Union were successful plays towards generating awareness among the people. The Department of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj, Government of Manipur also utilized this medium for spreading awareness on sanitation. Mention can be made of playwright Rupachandra Gosh's "Anouba Mangal" performed by Shining Star Union, "Amambada Meingal" performed by Bir Tikendrajit Artistes Union and "Anouba Lambi" (tr. New Path) of Kamakhya Sangeet Mandal. The Science and Technology Department also produced play on environment entitled "Anouba Tomlin". Chingthang Lakhoo's street play entitled "Srinpu Hangba" (tr. Opening Saving) performed by Compositional Artistes Association was produced for generating awareness on national savings insurance. This play was translated into Hindi, Tamil, Bengali and English, and performed all over India. Manipur Co-artist Association's Shumang Lila "Makhong Taragi Cheingak" (tr. Ten legged Support Stand) was also produced under the State Veterinary and Animal Husbandry Department, Manipur for awareness generation on animal husbandry services. Manaobi MM's play "Naitom Satpi" (tr. Single offspring) was a successful Shumang Lila based on leprosy disease and performed by the Peacemaker Artistes Association.

Peacemaker Artistes Association's "Opium War" and Sana Leibak Nachon Artistes Association's "Ugandagi Marabak" are historical plays campaigning against drug abuse and illicit trafficking. Optimum utilization of the traditional media for public awareness was in AIDS awareness campaigns. Street play on AIDS awareness entitled "Amamba Leichil" written by Congthang Samarendra may be termed as the first play produced for spreading AIDS awareness. Street play "Matangi Hello!" (Tanna Artistes Group) was widely displayed in public places under the Manipur AIDS Control Society in 1999. "Lambi Manga" (tr.

as Five Ways) of Romantic Artistes Association was also staged at Cachar and Hojai districts of Assam. Thoudam Ruhinlikkar's street play "AIDS Ta Nokphade" was also a popular play on AIDS awareness. Successful plays on AIDS awareness were "Khuntak Lashdiringaida" (tr. Before Holocaust happens) written by Rupachandra Gosh and performed by Dedicated World Artistes Association, "Nagshigi Nonglet" (tr. Today's Storm) of Chana Lukhoo (North Imphal Manipur Jatra Mandal), "Swaragati Lambi" (tr. Heaven's Path) of Thangiam Birchand (Imphal Jatra cum Drama Association), "Monalisha" of Rupachandra Gosh (North Imphal Manipur Jatra Mandal), "Matangi Khoimu" of Chana Lukhoo (Naharol Khongthang Artistes Association), "Thengmankhara Thabalse" (tr. This Delayed Moonlight) of Thokhom Prafullo (North Imphal Manipur Jatra Mandal), "Jhijir" of Hiyang Manisana (Meitei Leima Jatra cum Drama Association), "Eidi Luhongjararoi" (tr. I'll not marry) of Manaobi MM (Imphal Jatra cum Drama Association), "Djuko Lily" of Niladhwaia Khuman (Bir Tikendrajit Artistes Union), "Mitungshigi Mityeng Ama" (tr. One Sympathetic View) of Niladhwaia Khuman (Bir Tikendrajit Artistes Union), "Punshi Khongchao" (tr. Life Cycle) of Goudrahaia Shuma, "Under Arrest" of Ranjit Ningthouja (Bir Tikendrajit Artistes Union) etc.

As a traditional medium of communication, Shumang Lila has the advantage of instant rapport with the people and flexibility to incorporate new ideas and conviction. Traditional performing arts such as the Shumang Lila carry the messages of change, development and growth, as Rabindranath Tagore puts it aptly "All traditional structure of art must have sufficient degree of elasticity to allow it to respond to varied impulses of life, delicate or virile, to grow with its growth, to dance with its rhythm". Thus, during times of hectic conflict between state and non-state actors, Shumang Lila has tried to discuss the issue objectively on the stage. It has successfully generated awareness on various issues of the state including deadly diseases. The famous message-carrier plays of the past like "Chayam Pokpa", "Abir Khan", "Dr. Paal", "Panthobi Soyal" and so many others are still popular among the contemporary audience.

### SHUMANG LILA IN TRIBAL DIALECTS

Tribal Shumang Lila appeared for a short period in the history of Shumang Lila in Manipur. In the absence of any further encouragement and support, it lost its way. In the year 2002, a few interested people initiated an experiment by introducing

Shumang Lila among the selected tribal artistes groups and made them display at villages in hills to spread useful messages for their life. The taste was very good and unexpected. There was active involvement and participation among the artistes - there was hectic enthusiasm among the audience. Interestingly, when the premier show of Tangkhul Shumang Lila "Ajawui Tuishot" was first staged at Dewland sometime in 2002, the 1000-packed audience was enthralled by the artistes of C.R. Film Industry based in Phungreithang, Ukhrul. The play was full of comedies. Even Meities who did not know Tangkhul dialect fell made in laughter. Thereafter, these plays were shown in different villages of Ukhrul district on demand by the public. The experiment was successful indeed.

Likewise, the Paites also developed their Shumang lila "Khangban Sham Doh Ei" and performed for the first time at Pait Veng Imphal in the same year. The Thadou under the banner of United Rural Youth Artistes Manipur produced and played "Heo Neingadamin" and the All Zeliangrong Art and Cultural Organisation of Kubuis performed "Phaikan Kathan". The Thadou play was displayed at Tuibong for the first time and Kabui play was shown at Pandon, North AOC. All these plays were the same as the "Shumang Lila" performed by the Meites. The only differences were - it was in their own dialects and the females played female roles and males as males. There was no tradition of "Nupi Sabi" among them. A short span after production and display in remote villages of hill districts of the state, the Tribal Shumang Lila unfortunately discontinued for there was none to encourage and support.

Actually, these plays were produced by the Manipur State AIDS Control Society for spreading AIDS awareness in tribal populated areas. The popularity of Shumang Lila among the Meitei community and its being a highly effective messenger for HIV/AIDS prompted the then Project Director of Manipur AIDS Control Society - Dr. Khomdon Singh Lisam. He put extra effort to introduce and experiment the age-old Shumang Lila tradition among the different tribal communities. On 19 and 20 July, 2002, the Manipur State AIDS Control Society organised a workshop for scriptwriters and Directors at Mass Hotel Imphal where around thirty playwright, artistes and Director belonging to tribal communities attended. The project was to organize plays in tribal dialects with a dual-objective - to spread awareness on HIV/AIDS in nook and corner of the states and also to enrich the tradition and culture of the hill people with the initiation of Shumang Lila. Those who took active

part at the initial stage were renowned playwright Chana Lukhoo, Shumang Lila Personality Narendra Ningombi, Artist Rai Khan Assurance (Tangkhul), writer Lanboi Kabui (All Zeliangrong Art and Cultural Organisation), artist Th. Angam (Thadou community) and so on. Playwright Chana Lukhoo and Dr. Khomdon Lisam took the pains in translating the scripts of these Shumang Lilas. The late Shumang Lila Gurus Laikangbam Ibombi (Mama Ibombi), Mangsidam Binod (Leikang) and Thokhom Ibema Leima took the responsibility to train the tribal artistes by going from one hill district to another and staying there for a long period. It was a herculean task to teach Shumang Lila to the tribal people as there was a language barrier between the trainers and the trainees. The scripts were their own. The tribal brethren have their own stories related to HIV and AIDS - which they penned and dramatized. A committee comprising Dr. Nognmaithe Tombi, Meghachandra Kongbam, Chana Lukhoo, Dr. Khomdon Lisam and one other from the community concerned observed the plays and moulded to its presentable shape. In fact, the popularity of Shumang Lila among the tribal people is no less than that of Meites. When they saw their own people playing in their own dialects, their enthusiasm unexpectedly grew to a level that could not be provided by any other art form. Indeed, sharing of this tradition among the different communities of Manipur will bring a closer tie among the people of the state.

### NEED FOR PRESERVATION OF SHUMANG LILA IN TRIBAL DIALECTS

It is unfortunate that the tribal Shumang Lilas met an immature end due to lack of nourishment. Neither its creator nor the government department of Art and Culture seem to take its responsibility. Shumang Lila in tribal dialects (Tribal Shumang Lila) may be preserved and promoted as an effective means of mass communication. It will help promote the art and culture of the tribal communities. It will help increase interactivity among the various groups in Manipur. Moreover, it is the right of the indigenous peoples to preserve their own traditional art forms in their own interests. In the valley, people used to invite Shumang Lila for performance on various occasions by paying a certain fee, thereby sustaining the artistes groups. However, such is not the case with tribal Shumang Lila groups. It is imperative to nurture and nourish their plays until it reach the status of standing on its own feet and provides a moral or alternative and gainful sustenance. (Concluded)

## National & International News

### Police arrest 3 men on suspicion of links to Jakarta attack

**AP Jakarta, Jan. 15:** Indonesian police on Friday arrested three men on suspicion of links to the bruzen attacks in the heart of the country's capital, and said they recovered a flag of the Islamic State group from the home of one of the attackers. The discovery of the flag bolsters authorities' claim that the attack Thursday was carried out by the Islamic State group, which controls territory in Syria and Iraq and whose ambition to create an Islamic caliphate has attracted 30,000 foreign fighters from around the world, including a few hundred Indonesians and Malaysians. The arrests of the three took place at their homes in Depok on the outskirts of Jakarta, police said in a text message, citing Col. Khrisna Murti, director of criminal investigations who led the raid. It said they were arrested for suspected links to the attackers. MetroTV. It broadcast footage of the handcuffed men being escorted by police. Five men attacked a Starbucks cafe and a traffic police booth with hand-made bombs, guns and suicide belts Thursday, killing two people - a Canadian and an Indonesian - and

injuring 20. The attackers were killed subsequently, either by their suicide vests or by police. National police spokesman Maj. Gen. Anton Charliyan told reporters a black IS flag was found in the home of one of the attackers and police believe they have established their identities. He says two of the five men were previously convicted and imprisoned for terrorism offenses. The IS link, if proved, poses a grave challenge to Indonesian security forces because until now the group was known only to have sympathizers with no active cells capable of planning and carrying out such an attack. In recent years Indonesian anti-terror forces had successfully stamped out another extremist group known as Jemaah Islamiyah. It was responsible for several attacks in Indonesia, including the 2002 bombings of bars in Bali, which left 202 people dead, as well as two hotel bombings in Jakarta in 2009 that killed seven people. Terrorist experts say IS supporters in Indonesia are being recruited from the remnants of Jemaah Islamiyah. A few hundred Indonesians are known to have traveled to Syria to

join the IS. Few have come back. Still, police believe that an Indonesian IS fighter, Bahrum Naim, who is in Syria may have inspired and instigated the Jakarta attack. Jakarta residents were shaken by Thursday's events but refused to be cowed. The area near the Starbucks cafe remained cordoned off with a highly visible police presence. Onlookers and journalists lingered, with some people leaving flowers and messages of support. A large screen atop the building that houses the Starbucks displayed messages that said "PrayforJakarta" and "Indonesia Unite". Newspapers carried bold front-page headlines declaring the country was united in condemnation of the attack, which was the first in Indonesia, the world's largest Muslim-majority nation, since the hotel bombings in 2009. Risti Amelia, an accountant at a company near the Starbucks said she was "still shaking and weak" when she returned to her office Friday. But because staff remained emotionless, the company decided to send workers home, she said.